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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - PARAGRAPHS RENUMBERED CORRECTLY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [PA](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: RISING ANGER OVER GAZA

REF: A. 2008 CAIRO 2585

[1](#)B. CAIRO 2  
[1](#)C. CAIRO 7  
[1](#)D. CAIRO 17  
[1](#)E. CAIRO 26

Classified By: DCM Matthew H. Tueller, for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Egyptians are seething over Israeli military operations in Gaza. The January 9 "Day of Anger and Solidarity with Gaza," supported by a range of Egyptian opposition forces, most prominently the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), featured the largest protests since the crisis began, with over 50,000 demonstrators in Alexandria (Egypt's second-largest city), and thousands of protesters elsewhere across Egypt. No demonstrations materialized in Cairo, due to an immobilizing police presence outside of mosques. To date, the GOE has successfully kept the lid on rising popular anger, mainly owing to the well-honed tactics of the security forces at preventing and controlling demonstrations, and the "why bother" attitude of the notoriously politically apathetic Egyptian public. Leave for Egyptian police has reportedly been canceled nationwide, as the security services brace to continue to contain public ire. As civilian casualties mount, and more photos of dead Palestinian children are featured on Arab satellite TV and in Egyptian newspapers, the pressure on the GOE will concurrently rise. The reported January 11 wounding of four Egyptians, including two children, during Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza-Egypt border, will likely escalate popular anger. If Israeli military operations are still continuing, the next Friday prayers on January 16 will be a clear gauge of public upset, and of the GOE's ability to continue to keep it in check. End summary and comment.

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DEMONSTRATIONS THWARTED IN CAIRO; GROWING ELSEWHERE  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) In the first week of Israel's Gaza operation, several thousand-strong demonstrations were held throughout Cairo (refs A-E), with protesters chanting "We are all Hamas!" and waving Palestinian flags. As the situation progressed, and the protesters' slogans began to give voice to Egyptian anger at the government's perceived lack of action and "complicity" with the Israelis, the security forces moved aggressively to scale back or foil planned Cairo rallies. On January 2, police used force to break up demonstrations after Friday prayers in central Cairo, beating a journalist unconscious. A planned January 9 "Day of Anger and Solidarity With Gaza," called for by Qatari-based Egyptian shaykh Yusuf al Qaradawi, and endorsed by a wide range of Egyptian oppositionists, including the influential MB and the liberal "Kefaya" (Enough) and April 6 movements, was largely a non-event in Cairo. Outside the popular Al Fat'h mosque in central Cairo, site of previous protests, we

observed a massive police presence on January 9 that successfully prevented a planned demonstration. Over 50 large security trucks surrounded the square outside the mosque, with rows of riot police four-men deep lining the streets. The Ministry of Awqaf ("Religious Endowments") reportedly instructed imams not to discuss Gaza during their Friday sermons, and accordingly, none of the sermons we heard (in a range of Cairo mosques) specifically mentioned Gaza. All the sermons did, however, include prayers for "Palestinian martyrs," called for "victory for Palestine," and asked God to "destroy the Jews and their supporters."

13. (SBU) Outside of Cairo, dozens of demonstrations were held on January 9, the largest reportedly being in Alexandria, where 50,000-75,000 demonstrators, led by MB parliamentarians, gathered outside the central Al Qaid Ibrahim mosque, chanting "Down with Israel, and with it every collaborator," and "Gaza, excuse us - opening Rafah is not in our hands!" (Note: Egyptian demonstrations rarely exceed 10,000 people, so the numbers in Alexandria are notable. End note). Police reportedly tried to halt the Alexandria demonstration, but were unable to due to the sheer numbers involved, so ended up simply putting up a security cordon around the area. An MB-organized protest of between 1,000-10,000 was also reported in the Sinai border town of El Arish, where anger is particularly pronounced, due to the familial and economic ties of many residents with Gaza. Local contacts report that the demonstration turned violent, with clashes between police and angry demonstrators lasting nearly two hours, with injuries on both sides, and numerous protesters arrested. Protesters reportedly destroyed numerous shops and cars; the first such vandalism during Gaza-related protests. Protests of between 1,000-10,000 were also reported in cities across the Nile Delta, as well as the upper Egyptian cities of Assiyut (5,000), El Minya (2,000), ena (4,000), and Aswan (1,500). Most of the demonstrations were organized by the MB. Over the past two weeks, approximately 1,000 MB members have been in arrested in connection with demonstrations and attempted aid convoys to Gaza. To date, none of the demonstrations we have observed have included any anti-American rhetoric; rather, the demonstrators have focused on Israel, and their own regime.

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ACTION IN PARLIAMENT AND PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES  
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14. (SBU) Since Israeli military action commenced, acrimonious debates have been ongoing in the Egyptian People's Assembly, with MP's from the 86-member MB parliamentary bloc, together with other independent parliamentarians, calling for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Egypt, the withdrawal of the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv, an opening of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, and a halt in Egyptian gas shipments to Israel. On January 11, the exchanges turned particularly nasty, with MP's throwing shoes at each other, and shouting accusations of treason. The MB's popular pro-Gaza stance makes the situation particularly uncomfortable for MP's from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), who, with a few exceptions among the parliamentary leadership, apparently find it difficult to publicly take on their Islamist counterparts.

15. (SBU) Egypt's professional organizations, most of which are dominated by MB members, have been vocal in their opposition to Israeli action. The Press Syndicate, a traditional focal point for opposition protests, has been host to several demonstrations numbering between 4,000-10,000 participants. The journalists organization has also organized a blood drive, and a foiled aid convoy to Gaza. Bar Syndicate offices across Egypt have staged small-scale demonstrations (numbering in the hundreds), and a mass protest organized by the Engineer's Syndicate was blocked by security forces. Several syndicates have issued statements condemning the "massacres" in Gaza, demanding a halt to natural gas exports to Israel and calling for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador. The Doctor's Syndicate organized a donation campaign for Gaza, which reportedly has collected

10 million LE (approximately 1.8 million USD) to date, and has spearheaded the organization of convoys with medical assistance and physicians to Gaza. The dozens of doctors who attempted to travel to Gaza have been turned back at the Rafah border crossing. Several members of the Gaza Relief Committee of the Doctor's Syndicate were arrested on January 2, prior to a planned demonstration.

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RULING PARTY ATTEMPTS AT SPIN FALLING FLAT  
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¶16. (SBU) Clearly feeling the heat from public anger at the government, and anxious to seize some momentum from the MB, on January 8 the ruling NDP launched a series of nationwide town-hall meetings and NDP-led "rallies" about Gaza. According to the NDP's website, the gatherings will "express support for the Palestinian people, underline the opposition of Egyptians to war on Gaza, denounce the massacre of the people of Palestine, and explain the steps that Egypt has taken to end Palestinian suffering." The NDP has also been collecting money, food, clothes, and blood to send to Gaza. Thus far, attendance at the NDP events has reportedly only numbered in the hundreds.

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EGYPTIAN SCHIZOPHRENIA ON GAZA  
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¶17. (SBU) While the overwhelming sentiment of Egyptians about the Gaza operation is anger, a minority is not quite as sympathetic to the Palestinians. Lingering animus over the Hamas-organized January 2008 border breach still colors the opinions of some Egyptians. Such sentiments were reinforced by the December 28 killing of an Egyptian border guard. His funeral drew a reported 30,000 mourners, many of whom chanted anti-Hamas slogans. On the social networking site Facebook, a breeding ground for Egyptian political activism, a group was recently created called "Sorry Gaza, I'm not Sympathetic." The group has 4,838 members, who all signed up to endorse ten points that reject solidarity with Gaza, including, "Helping the 44% of the Egyptian population that is in poverty takes priority over helping others, .... The richest Arabs are Palestinians, and the Palestinian economy is better than the Egyptian one, .... The 2008 border breach was unacceptable, ... and Egyptians should demonstrate for Egyptian issues only!" Overall, however, Egyptians with such views on the conflict are outnumbered by the vast majority of their countrymen, who are furious with Israel, the West writ large, and with their own government.

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